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ABSTRACT

Psychosocial theory, based on the ideas of Erik Erikson and Robert Havighurst, is proposed as a useful framework for conceptualizing the potential for growth within the family. Erikson's (1950) eight stage theory of psychosocial development and Havighurst's (1959) concept of developmental tasks are used to take account of the stages of development of both parents and children in looking at the reciprocal influence of parents and children on one another. At each stage of development, the emerging competencies and the normative crisis of the period are seen to influence the skills and the preoccupations that family members bring to their interactions. Erikson's concept of psychosocial crisis is used to examine phases of development when there is the potential for support and encouragement, or for heightened tension among family members. The theory postulates that at each stage of development society makes certain psychic demands upon the individual. The process of adjustment to these demands produces a state of tension or crisis within the individual that forces the person to utilize developmental skills that have only recently been mastered. Processes and skills of crisis resolution that are unique to each of the stages of the life cycle are outlined. The concept of coping, which is similar to White's (1960) concept of active mastery, is related to the process of crisis resolution. Coping involves a new approach that will bring the person beyond the problem and into a new relationship with the environment. (Author/SS)

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THE IMPLICATIONS OF PSYCHOSOCIAL THEORY FOR PERSONAL GROWTH IN THE FAMILY

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THE IMPLICATIONS OF PSYCHOSOCIAL THEORY FOR PERSONAL GROWTH IN THE FAMILY

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In this paper, we offer a psychosocial analysis of the reciprocal influences of parents and children in the family group. We are impressed by psychosocial theory as a framework within which to approach issues of human growth and potential in the family because of its life span perspective, its emphasis on the interplay between historical and contemporary determinants of behavior, and its appreciation for the active, creative role of the person in directing psychological growth. Five concepts of psychosocial theory provide the focus for the following analysis. They are: stages of development, developmental tasks, psychosocial crisis, the central process for the resolution of the crisis, and coping. Each concept will be considered for the way in which it increases our appreciation of the dynamic interaction that takes place within the family group.

Stages of Development

Erikson (1950) proposes eight sequential stages of psychosocial development through the life cycle. We (1975) have suggested that the number of stages be expanded to nine in order to include two stages of adolescence rather than one. The psychosocial stages and their approximate age ranges are: 1) infancy (birth to two years); 2) toddlerhood (2-4 years); 3) early school age (5-7 years); 4) middle school age (8-12 years); 5) early adolescence (13-17 years); 6) later adolescence (18-22 years); 7) early adulthood (23-30 years); 8) middle adulthood

(31-50 years); and 9) later adulthood (51-). The age ranges of each stage are only approximations. In a conception of psychological stages of development one moves from one stage to another when certain psychological events have occurred, regardless of one's chronological age. Two assumptions of this as well as other stage theories are that each stage is qualitatively different from the others, and that the quality of psychological development that takes place at each stage will have a significant impact on subsequent stages.

The role of parent may begin as early as early adolescence and once begun continues throughout adulthood. The role of child begins, obviously, in infancy, and continues throughout life. To inquire, then, about the reciprocal influence of parents and children one must begin with an appreciation of the stage of development of both parents and children. At each stage of development, the emerging competences and the normative crisis of the period will influence the skills and the preoccupations that family members bring to their interactions. The kind of parenting that would be expected of adults caring for a young infant would certainly not be normative for adults caring for an early adolescent child. Similarly, the kinds of interactions children might come to expect with parents who are 28 or 29 years old would probably not be continued when the parents are 68 or 69.

The implications of the concept of developmental stages for the family are these: First, while the role of child is lifelong, the role persists through changing stages of development thus requiring parental adaptation to changing needs. Second, parenting may begin as early as early adolescence or as late as middle adulthood. Depending

on the stage of development, the parents' competences, concerns, and perspective on the parent role as it fits into a total self theory will differ. Third, parents are also moving through stages of their own development as they enact the parent role. Changes in the parent's competences and concerns can result in a waxing or waning of involvement in parenting as a life activity.

Developmental Tasks

The concept of developmental tasks as it is discussed by Robert Havighurst (1959) refers to a set of skills and competences that are acquired by the individual at each stage of development that permit increased mastery over the environment. The tasks may reflect gains in motor, intellectual, social, and emotional skills. Mastery of the tasks of later stages of development often depends on the successful acquisition of earlier and simpler skills.

The concept of developmental tasks implies that development is hard work. Growth requires individual commitment to engage the environment and to exert energy. The reward for this effort is most clearly understood in Robert White's notion of competence or effectance motivation. The infant gives up the stability of crawling for the precariousness of walking; the adolescent drifts from the comfort of the family to the challenge of the peer group; the adult seeks to move from a position of less authority to a position of greater authority. Each of these changes brings an added sense of autonomy and competence. The notion of developmental tasks reminds us never to ignore the power of the competence motive in our interpretation of family interactions.

Work on developmental tasks has the potential for bringing conflict to family interactions. Several examples illustrate this potential. First, think of the mother who is trying to develop parenting skills. As part of this new role, she may view the toddler's obedience as evidence of her competence. The toddler, from his or her own perspective, views doing things autonomously as evidence of competence. From the discrepancy between these perspectives the "Do it my way" - "No, I like it my way" conflict emerges. Second, adult efforts to develop competences in other areas may conflict with the parenting role. We think especially of the demands on the young adult to show commitment to the work setting. Long hours, frequent travel, evening meetings, and weekend work assignments cannot help but take time and energy from interactions with children. Think of the likely response when a young father tells his boss that his son is sick and he wants to be home to help care for him, or the conflict in roles when a child is to participate in a school play but both parents are expected to be at work.

Work on developmental tasks also has the potential for enhancing family interactions. This view has had little attention in the literature, and yet we would argue that it is one of the major satisfactions of the parent role. Daily interaction with one's children changes one's psychology. Observations of the child at play reawaken memories of one's own play experiences. Seeing children make a mess, we are often caught up in remembering our own past training. As the child approaches each new experience, adults can see those experiences freshly through the child's eyes. The delight in finding renewed interest in a raindrop, a squirrel, or an electric outlet brings a new energy into the adult's experience. As a part of parenting, one begins to introduce children to the experiences of one's own childhood. In the process, many

activities that may have been lost during adolescence and young adulthood are rediscovered. Sliding down a snowbank, running under the sprinkler in underpants, cutting holes in paper bags for masks and scaring each other, drawing chalk hopscotch patterns on the cement--thousands of sensorimotor and representational experiences that lay dust covered in the mind's attic are rediscovered in parenting.

Of course, the child also blazes new paths that tempt parents to follow. A child's talent at astronomy or ice skating or drawing may lure adults to try their hand at these new activities. The school-age child brings home information, social and political attitudes, and bathroom jargon that broadens the parent's perspective. With each contradiction between the parents' values and the child's education, parents are challenged to redefine their stance and to communicate it to their children. Not infrequently, the child can perceive changes in his or her parents' views that are the result of the child's own exposure to new ideas.

The child's accomplishments are experienced vicariously by parents and may serve as sources of self-esteem for the adult. Since children are changing rapidly in the first 10 years of life, the opportunity to observe one's child conquer some new challenge comes frequently. With each child, there is a renewed process of challenge and conquest as the child learns to sit alone, to walk, to ride a bicycle, to read, to build a model plane, or to write a poem. Parents are touched by every success, and each conquest increases their own sense of effectiveness to some degree. One cannot fully appreciate the family group without considering the ways in which parents are changed by their children. We do not view these changes merely in terms of alterations in caregiving but as funda-

mental personal growth that may inspire the adult in spheres of activity outside the home as well as in a reconceptualization of the self-concept.

Of course, a parent's success in developmental tasks has the potential for enhancing the child's growth. Success in household management, planning for the future, career development, or community involvement bring new resources to the family group. The parent's sense of his or her own competence provides a background of self assurance and self acceptance that is important to the child's willingness to take the risks necessary for further growth.

Failure in the developmental tasks by one family member may have implications for the development of other family members. If a child does not learn to read, parents may question their competence as models of intellectual achievement. If an adult loses his or her job, children may doubt their own potential for success in work related activities. If an adult child divorces, older parents may question their own effectiveness in helping their children to experience intimacy. Because we use our parents and our children as guages of our own development, their successes and failures become important indices of our own growth potential.

The Psychosocial Crisis

The psychosocial crisis (Erikson, 1950) refers to the person's psychological efforts to adjust to the demands of the social environment at each stage of development. The word crisis, in this context, refers to a normal set of stresses and strains rather than to an extraordinary set of events. The theory postulates that at each stage of development, the society makes certain psychic demands upon the individual. These demands differ from stage to stage and from culture

to culture. The demands are experienced by the individual as persistent guidelines and expectations for behavior. As one nears the end of a particular stage of development, one is forced to make some type of resolution- adjusting oneself to the demands of the society while simultaneously translating societal demands into personally gratifying terms.

This process produces a state of tension within the individual which must be reduced in order for the person to proceed to the next stage of development. Each psychosocial crisis is accompanied by a state of tension that may be thought of as developmental anxiety. The psychosocial crisis of a stage forces the person to utilize developmental skills that have only recently been mastered. There is, therefore, an inter-relationship between work on the developmental tasks of the stage and the resolution of the psychosocial crisis of that stage. In addition, it is hypothesized that resolutions of previous crises will influence resolutions of current and future crises.

Perhaps the most important contribution of this concept is that growth involves psychological tension. The dynamic interplay between cultural demands and individual capacities necessarily suggests that as one makes the transition from stage to stage there will be periods of increased uncertainty about one's capacity to meet coming demands and, perhaps, some resistance to leaving the stability of an earlier stage. This combination of uncertainty and resistance generates anxiety. In fact, the theory would suggest that developmental anxiety, that is anxiety about one's ability to succeed at developmental tasks of the stage, may be a continuous part of life, waxing and waning during one's movement through each developmental stage. If one can learn to read this

anxiety as a signal of growth, movement, and transition, one can begin to focus attention on those aspects of life experience that appear to be changing. We often tend to read anxiety as a negative sign, a sign of danger or threat. One implication of the notion of normal crisis is that anxiety can serve as a signal and even as a motivational force for work which is necessary in order for growth to continue.

As we think about the family group, the concept of psychosocial crisis alerts us to the potential for support and encouragement among family members. In general, we expect th[illegible] support to come from parents whose periods of change are slower and who have already experienced many of the same crises in earlier phases of their own development. Support can also come from older siblings or from grandparents who may feel more willing to encourage experimentation and less responsible for a negative outcome. On the other hand, the concept of psychosocial crisis warns that there may be periods when both parents and children are experiencing heightened tension. During these phases the family may be particularly vulnerable to disruption or dissolution. We think of the potential conflict between the infant's need to establish trust and the parent's unresolved work on intimacy or the middle adult's efforts to establish a sense of generativity and the older adolescent's persistent questioning in the process of identity formation. In these examples, the child's preoccupation with the psychosocial crisis of his or her own stage may make the person's behavior especially disruptive for the parent's growth and vice versa.

Among the nine psychosocial crises, five depend heavily on the family context for their resolution. These include trust vs. mistrust; autonomy vs. shame and doubt, initiative vs. guilt; intimacy vs. isolation; and generativity vs. stagnation. While we are accustomed to thinking of the

child's development as dependent on the support and responsiveness of parents, psychosocial theory emphasizes that the adult's continued growth is also dependent on the quality of interactions with children. The clearest example of this influence is in the achievement of a sense of generativity.

Parenting requires continuous adaptation to the child's changing capacities. As one reacts to new needs for stimulation, new modes for expressing emotions, or new competences in the child, one is almost automatically propelled toward a view of the future. What will she be like three weeks, three months, or three years from now? What must I do to prepare for her future? What will I be like then? What will our relationship be then? All of these thoughts stimulate a more active planning orientation. As one faces the future of one's children, one becomes increasingly committed to trying to insure that its content will be favorable. Generativity, in that sense, can be born out of child rearing. One sees oneself as an active agent, responsible for protecting the future of one's children. This may be possible in many small ways or in dramatically obvious contributions that effect the entire social community. Generativity can be achieved by communicating a philosophy of life to one's children that will serve them well in the future as well as by altering the environment in some way so that the quality of life is improved.

As one thinks about personal growth, the crux of psychosocial development seems to focus on later adolescence and the resolution of identity. During this period, the person evolves a creative integration of past identifications, personal competences, and future aspirations that guide a whole range of future life choices. However, when one

thinks about the culture as a whole, the critical life stage appears to be middle adulthood. The concept of generativity is a key mechanism in the ecological process of succession. During middle adulthood, adults have the skills and resources to make significant contributions to their society. If they succeed in expressing a generative orientation, their children and all children will look with enthusiasm toward their own participation in the adult roles of the culture. Children, watching their adult parents, observe their relationship to the elderly, to younger adults, to adolescents, and to their own peers. They come to anticipate a cultural pattern of acceptance or rejection of each life stage that colors their own desire for future growth. More specifically, they learn about the attitudes of their parents toward parenting itself. The presence or absence of generativity in the middle adult generation has far reaching implications for the orientation of younger generations toward the parent role, and for the resources and preparation that the society provides for the care and education of young children.

The Central Process for the Resolution of Crisis

Every psychosocial crisis reflects some discrepancy between the developmental competences of the person at the beginning of the stage and the societal pressures for more effective, integrated functioning. The notion of a central process for conflict resolution refers to the dominant context within which the conflict is resolved. At every life stage, the relevant players and the relevant competences change. We have emphasized certain kinds of psychological work and certain kinds of social interactions that appear to be necessary in order for a person to continue to grow at each life stage. During toddlerhood (2-4), for example, we have identified imitation as the central mechanism for psychosocial growth. During this period of life, children have the opportunity

to expand the range of their skills by imitating adults, siblings, television models, playmates, and even animals. Imitation appears to provide toddlers with enormous satisfaction. Through imitation they can increase the similarity between themselves and admired members of their social group. They can begin to experience the world as other people and animals experience it. They can exercise some control over events that may be frightening or confusing by imitating elements of those events in their play. The movement toward a sense of autonomy is facilitated by the child's readiness to imitate and by the variety of models available for observation. Imitation expands the range of behaviors children engage in. Through persistent imitative activity children acquire an expansion of their sense of self-initiated behavior and of their sense of control over their actions. Repetitive experiences of this kind lead to the development of a sense of personal autonomy.

In Table 1. we have presented the central processes which lead to the acquisition of new psychosocial skills, to the resolution of the psychosocial crisis, and to successful coping at each life stage.

Table 1.

The Central Process for Resolution of the Psychosocial Conflict

Life Stage	Central Process
Infancy (birth to 2 years)	Mutuality with the caregiver
Toddlerhood (2-4)	Imitation
Early School Age (5-7)	Identification
Middle School Age (8-12)	Education
Early Adolescence (13-17)	Peer pressure
Later Adolescence (18-22)	Role Experimentation
Young Adulthood (23-30)	Mutuality among peers
Middle Adulthood (30-50)	Person-environment fit and creativity
Later Adulthood (51-)	Introspection

According to this analysis, parents are most clearly involved in the psychosocial development of children during the first three stages of development. In infancy, mutuality with the caregiver is the context for

resolving the crisis of trust versus mistrust. In order for the infant to develop an optimistic orientation toward social relationships, the caregiver must be responsive. Imitation, the central process of toddlerhood, emphasizes the parent's role as a model. The child's personal autonomy is expanded by observing and being permitted to imitate the wide range of parental behaviors associated with adaptive functioning. In early school age, identification once again ties parents and children in a process of growth. As objects of identification, parents' values, beliefs, and aspirations become the focus of their children's attention. In wanting to be like their parents, children probe these areas with questions and assertions that may be at once provocative and provoking.

It must be obvious that as they provide the interactions necessary for these processes to emerge, parents as well as children are profoundly touched by the struggle to resolve each crisis. Using the example of imitation once again, one need only imagine what it is like to recognize that your every action is a potential target for imitation. From your tone of voice to your nonverbal gestures, from your most competent to your most bumbling efforts, toddler age children observe with intense interest and imitate those actions or expressions that impress or amuse them. It is sobering if not outright humiliating to be an object of such scrutiny. In watching their child proudly expand his or her competences through imitation, parents are given a boost to their own autonomy. They cannot help but recognize all those activities which they perform with ease that their toddlers achieve only after considerable struggle. Parents are also frequently reminded of the experiences of shame and doubt through this same mechanism of imitation.

"Did I say that?" "Is that the way I looked?" Parents see themselves in the mirror of their child's actions and may occasionally find the reflection embarrassing. Thus, the central processes of mutuality with the caregiver, imitation, and identification each provide opportunities for adult growth and personal reevaluation even as they contribute to the positive growth of the child.

Coping

The final concept to be considered in this analysis is the notion of coping. Coping refers to active efforts to resolve stress and to create new solutions to the challenges of each developmental stage. This idea is similar to White's (1960) concept of active mastery. The focus of psychosocial theory is on the process of growth and coping rather than on deterioration and defense. The confrontation between an individual and the environment is an essential component of psychological coping.

White (1974) refers to three components of the coping process: 1) the ability to gain and process new information, 2) the ability to maintain control over one's emotional state, and 3) the ability to move freely within one's environment. Coping can be understood as behaviors that allow for the development and growth of the individual, not merely the maintenance of equilibrium in the face of threat. Coping involves a new solution, a reorganization of information, a new approach that will bring the person beyond the problem and into a new relationship with the environment. One's capacity for coping depends on the stage of development, the achievement of the developmental tasks, and the balance of polarities involved in earlier psychosocial crisis.

There can be no question that childrearing provides rich opportunities for developing coping skills, (perhaps even more opportunities than we might have hoped for). At every phase, the child's growth poses conflicts for parents as the parents try to meet the child's needs and as the parents try to meet their own needs. In fact, the Feldmans (1976) have clearly documented that having children is associated with greater marital dissatisfaction than childlessness six months after delivery, after 15 years of marriage, and even after 31 years of marriage. Parenting is obviously no easy road to personal enhancement. It may be even contraindicated as a way of achieving emotional calm. On the other hand, the concept of coping alerts us to the fact that growth does not always mean turning away or minimizing tension. Frequently, it means choosing the path that is uncertain or intriguingly complex in hopes of growing through adaptation to that challenge. Clearly parenting provides that kind of challenge. By participating in a meaningful, responsive relationship with their own children, parents have the opportunity to articulate their own value system and to see the consequences of their efforts reflected in the continuous emergence of their children.

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